

BLACK WORK

Music and lyrics by EHUD BANAI



BACKGROUND ON EHUD BANAI

- Banai's first album was released in 1987. It contained several hits, and he continues to be a successful singer-songwriter to this day.
- He comes from a famous show-biz family, with uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces involved in TV or music.

ABOUT THE SONG

The original song was released in late 1987, soon after the height of the first wave of protest against Ethiopian immigrant discrimination. In 1985 the Ethiopian community began to protest at the way the Chief Rabbinate was insisting they undergo religious conversion in order to be recognized as Jewish. Sometimes a symbolic "second circumcision" was demanded, and most times people who had survived the deadly thousand-mile trek to Sudan in order to reach Zion were required to undergo a "conversion" in a mikveh ("they are told to cleanse, To wash away their innocence"). The final verse in particular recalls the demonstration outside the building of the Chief Rabbinate ("they shepherd their insult into town. They stand facing the building").

The dark-skinned brothers coming from Ethiopia
 Bring with them a marvelous ancient tradition
 These lost sons, after the hardships of the road
 Slowly discover the far-off land
 For years, they dreamed of it and now it's real
 When they are told to cleanse, to wash away their innocence.

• *He'achim k'hey ha'or sheba'im me'Etiofia*
 • *Mevi'im itam masoret mufla'a v'atika*
 • *Habanim ha'avudim, acharei tla'ot haderech*
 • *Megalim le'at le'at et haderech har'chukah*
 • *Hem shanim chalmu aleyha v'achshav zo hamtziyut*
 • *Kshe'omrim lahem litbol, lishtof et hatmimut.*

• האחים כהי העור שצבאים מאתיופיה
 • מביאים אתם מסורת מפלאה ועתיקה
 • הבנים האבודים, אחרי תלאות הדרך
 • מגלים לאט לאט את הארץ הרחוקה
 • הם שנים חלמו עליה, ועכשיו זו המציאות
 • כשאומרים להם לטבל, לשטף את התמימות.



And I saw in their eyes a kind of light
And who knows if Abraham was not black?

The dark-skinned brothers
In the absorption center in Tiberias
Try to absorb and be absorbed and it isn't easy
From campfire hearths,
from beyond the mountains of darkness
To a local street – digital and confused
They dreamed for years about home and now it is real
Even at home it happens – the Exile continues

And I saw in their eyes a kind of light
And who knows if Abraham was not black?

The dark-skinned brothers are barefoot by the roadside
By foot, they shepherd their insult into town
They stand facing the building,
facing a heart of stone
Waiting for the door to open from inside
They kept the faith, yes, they awaited the call
And now all that remains is black work.

*V'ani b'eyeneyhem ra'iti eyzeh or
Umi yeda im Avraham lo haya shachor?*

*He'achim k'hey ha'or b'mercaz klita b'tveriah
Menasim liklot u'l'hikalet v'zeh lo kal
Me'etzel hamedurah, me'ever l'harei hachoshech
El harechov hamekomi, hadiggitali, hambulbal.
Hem shanim chalmu al bayit v'achshav zo hamtziyut
Gam babayit zeh koref, nimshechet hagalut*

*V'ani b'eyeneyhem ra'iti eyzeh or
Umi yeda im Avraham lo haya shachor*

*He'achim k'hey ha'or y'chefim b'tzad haderech
Molichim et elbonam baregel el ha'ir
Hem omdim mul habinyan,
hem omdim mul lev shel even
M'chakim shetipatach hadelet mibifnim
Hem hayu ne'amanim, ken, hem chiku liv'sura
V'achshav ma she nish'ar zo avodah shchora.*

ואני בעיניהם ראיתי איזה אור
ומי ידע אם אברהם לא היה שחור

האחים כהי העור במרכז קליטה בטבריה
מנסים לקלט ולהקלט וזה לא קל
מאצל המדורה, מעבר להרי החשך
אל הרחוב המקומי, הדיגיטאלי, המבלבל.
הם שנים חלמו על בית ועכשיו זו המציאות
גם בבית זה קורה, נמשכת הגלות

ואני בעיניהם ראיתי איזה אור
ומי ידע אם אברהם לא היה שחור

האחים כהי העור יחפים בצד הדרך
מוליכים את עלבונם ברגל אל העיר
הם עומדים מול הבנין,
הם עומדים מול לב של אבן
מחכים שתפתח הדלת מבפנים.
הם היו נאמנים, כן, הם חכו לה לבשורה
ועכשיו מה שנשאר זו עבודה שחורה.

AND NOW YOU

- What would you say are the similarities and the differences between the Ethiopian Jewish experience in Israel and the Black experience in your country?

BACKGROUND TO THE REMAKE

In 2018 [Banai collaborated with other artists](#) to protest a different example of what he saw as discrimination against dark-skinned Africans in Israel. This time the fight was against the expulsion of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum-seekers. Since the year 2000 tens of thousands of people had fled war-torn Eritrea and Sudan, survived the deadly journey through Egypt, trekked through the Sinai desert, and found their way



into Israel. In Israel these people are very rarely granted refugee status, live in poverty in the poorest areas of Israel (in particular South Tel Aviv) and successive governments have searched for a way to remove them. A movement against the latest expulsion plans emerged, and recruited many artists to aid in their struggle.

(To this day some 40,000 asylum seekers live in limbo in Israel, hoping to return home one day, suffering poverty and lack of rights in a country that rarely processes asylum requests.)

GUIDING QUESTIONS AFTER HEARING THE REMAKE:

- While both Ethiopian immigrants and African asylum seekers suffered from and continue to suffer from discrimination, the attitude of the Government to their arrival and settlement in Israel was very different. What do you understand to be the difference between these various attitudes, what does this tell you about Israel, and how do you feel about it?

THEMES

- # **Racism**
- # **Alienation**
- # **Disillusion**
- # **Disappointment**
- # **Despair**
- # **Diversity**
- # **Ethiopian Jewry**
- # **Humiliation**
- # **Black Lives Matter**